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RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1166
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TAGS: [NATO](#) [PINS](#) [PREL](#) [MOPS](#) [MARR](#) [LO](#)
SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR DEPUTY SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
ENGLAND'S SEPTEMBER 5 MEETING WITH SLOVAK DEFENSE MINISTER
KASICKY

REF: A. BRATISLAVA 421

[1](#)B. BRATISLAVA 456

Classified By: Ambassador Rodolphe M. Vallee
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) YOUR MEETING WITH SLOVAK DEFENSE MINISTER FRANTISEK KASICKY WILL TAKE PLACE DURING HIS FIRST VISIT TO THE U.S. SINCE HIS APPOINTMENT IN JUNE 2006. IT WILL PROVIDE A TIMELY OPPORTUNITY TO ENCOURAGE A TOO OFTEN RELUCTANT NATO ALLY TO ASSUME A GREATER SHARE OF RESPONSIBILITY. KASICKY WILL MEET IN THE COMING DAYS WITH PRIME MINISTER FICO, FOREIGN MINISTER KUBIS, AND SLOVAK NATO PERMREP SLOBODNIK TO DISCUSS OPTIONS FOR ADDITIONAL ENGAGEMENT IN AFGHANISTAN. WHILE BOTH FICO AND PRESIDENT GASPAROVIC RECENTLY ASSURED THE AMBASSADOR THAT THEY WOULD BE WILLING TO SUPPORT GREATER SLOVAK PARTICIPATION IN ISAF, EXPERIENCE TELLS US THAT, WITH THIS GOVERNMENT, WE WILL HAVE TO PRESS HARD TO ACHIEVE EVEN MODEST RESULTS. THE KASICKY VISIT, THEREFORE, IS CRITICAL TO OUR ONGOING EFFORTS TO INCREASE SLOVAK CONTRIBUTIONS TO NATO OPERATIONS AND ITS GENERAL CAPABILITIES.

[1](#)2. (C) UNFORTUNATELY, FICO, A LEFTIST WITH POPULIST TENDENCIES, HAS SHOWN SCANT ENTHUSIASM FOR NATO OR THE TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONSHIP SINCE HIS ELECTION IN 2006. IN FACT, TO THE EXTENT HE HAS ENGAGED ON FOREIGN POLICY, HE HAS TENDED TO LOOK EASTWARD, TOWARD RUSSIA. FICO,S MAIN FOCUS, HOWEVER, IS DOMESTIC. HE IS IN THE ENVIABLE POSITION OF HAVING INHERITED THE BENEFITS OF THE PREVIOUS GOVERNMENT,S HARD-FOUGHT ECONOMIC REFORMS. THE SLOVAK ECONOMY IS GROWING AT THE RATE OF OVER 9 PERCENT A YEAR AND SLOVAKIA APPEARS TO BE ON TRACK FOR ENTRY INTO THE EURO ZONE IN 2009. NOT SURPRISINGLY, FICO AND HIS POLITICAL PARTY SMER ENJOY VERY HIGH APPROVAL RATINGS. FICO,S INWARD FOCUS AND HIS AMALGAM OF OLD-STYLE SOCIAL DEMOCRACY AND NATIONALISM SEEMS TO CURRENTLY PLAY WELL WITH THE SLOVAK PEOPLE. HIS GOVERNING COALITION PARTNERS HZDS, LED BY FORMER PRIME MINISTER VLADIMIR MECIAR (WHOSE AUTHORITARIAN AND CORRUPT RULE IN THE 1990'S SET BACK SLOVAKIA,S ACCESSION TO NATO) AND THE RIGHT-WING SLOVAK NATIONAL PARTY (SNS) ONLY REINFORCE FICO,S NATIONALIST, ANTI-WESTERN, ANTI-U.S. TENDENCIES.

[1](#)3. (C) THESE FACTORS MAKE SLOVAKIA, AT LEAST UNDER FICO, A LESS INHERENTLY RELIABLE PARTNER FOR BOTH THE U.S. AND NATO AND REQUIRES MORE LOBBYING ON OUR PART. FICO AND HIS

COALITION PARTNERS HAVE BEEN HIGHLY CRITICAL OF THE WAR IN IRAQ, MOST RECENTLY COMPARING THE INVASION OF IRAQ TO THE SOVIET INVASION OF CZECHOSLOVAKIA. FULFILLING HIS CAMPAIGN PROMISE, FICO WITHDREW SLOVAK TROOPS FROM IRAQ IN FEBRUARY 2007. DURING A VISIT TO RUSSIA, FICO CRITICIZED U.S. MISSILE DEFENSE PLANS. MEANWHILE, IT TOOK SLOVAKIA ALMOST SIX MONTHS TO RESPOND TO NATO'S REQUEST TO TRANSFER THE SLOVAK ENGINEERING CONTINGENT FROM KABUL TO KANDAHAR, AND THEN ONLY WITH A CAVEAT REQUIRING SLOVAK TROOPS TO ONLY OPERATE ON THE BASE. (IT IS AN INDICATION OF FICO'S CENTRALIZED DECISION-MAKING AND RISK AVERSION THAT THE DECISION WAS TAKEN ONLY AFTER HE HAD MADE A TRIP TO AFGHANISTAN TO ENSURE THE BASE WAS SECURE.) OTHER DEVELOPMENTS ARE SIMILARLY WORRISOME: DESPITE ROBUST ECONOMIC GROWTH, SLOVAKIA'S DEFENSE SPENDING HAS FALLEN WELL BELOW THE ALLIANCE BENCHMARK, TO 1.6 PERCENT OF GDP. THE DEFENSE BUDGET HAS CONTINUALLY DROPPED SINCE SLOVAKIA'S ACCEPTANCE INTO NATO IN 2004. PROGRESS ON DEFENSE REFORM IS MOVING FORWARD, ALBEIT SLOWLY. THE ABILITY TO PURCHASE NECESSARY EQUIPMENT IS LAGGING AS A RESULT OF BUDGET CUTS. ENCOURAGING KASICKY ON DEFENSE SPENDING IS CRITICAL TO OUR LONG-TERM EFFORTS.

14. (C) WE AND OUR NATO PARTNERS WILL NEED TO INTENSIFY EFFORTS TO MOVE SLOVAKIA TO DEEPEN AND BROADEN ITS COMMITMENT TO THE ALLIANCE. GIVEN FICO'S PROCLIVITIES, THIS MESSAGE WILL BE MOST EFFECTIVE IF AMPLIFIED BY OTHER NATO PARTNERS. GIVEN FICO'S GOVERNING STYLE, AND KASICKY'S UNWILLINGNESS TO TAKE RISKS HE BELIEVES WOULD CREATE POLITICAL TROUBLE FOR THE PRIME MINISTER, FICO NEEDS TO HEAR IT DIRECTLY, WHEN POSSIBLE. (WITH REGARD TO ADDITIONAL SLOVAK PARTICIPATION IN AFGHANISTAN, WE BELIEVE THAT A DIRECT APPROACH FROM THE KARZAI GOVERNMENT WOULD BE EFFECTIVE, AS WE HAVE RECOMMENDED TO DOD AND STATE.) FROM A LONGER TERM PERSPECTIVE, WE ALSO NEED TO ENSURE THE CONTINUED VITALITY OF MILITARY-TO-MILITARY RELATIONS WITH SLOVAKIA, IN BOTH THE BILATERAL AND NATO

CONTEXTS. SENIOR SLOVAK MILITARY LEADERSHIP CONTINUES TO TELL U.S. OFFICIALS THAT THE UNITED STATES IS THE STRATEGIC PARTNER OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC AND THAT THEY WOULD LIKE TO INCREASE MILITARY-TO-MILITARY COOPERATION. GIVEN THE POLITICAL CLIMATE, ENHANCED COOPERATION IS EVEN MORE ESSENTIAL TO OUR EFFORTS TO ENSURE THAT SLOVAKIA IS FIRMLY ANCHORED IN THE ALLIANCE.

15. (C) KASICKY IS A RETIRED SLOVAK ARMY COLONEL WHO SERVED AS A PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICER FOR THE MINISTRY OF DEFENSE AND BRIEFLY AS THE HEAD OF MILITARY COUNTERINTELLIGENCE AND ON THE SECURITY AND DEFENSE COMMITTEE IN PARLIAMENT. HE IS OBSEQUIOUSLY LOYAL TO THE PRIME MINISTER, AND IS RETICENT TO PROPOSE INITIATIVES WHICH DO NOT ALREADY ENJOY FICO'S SUPPORT. KASICKY, HIMSELF A PRODUCT OF THE IMET PROGRAM, HAS SAID HE WANTS TO USE THIS VISIT TO STRENGTHEN U.S.-SLOVAK DEFENSE COOPERATION. WE BELIEVE HE ALSO IS SEEKING VALIDATION THAT SLOVAKIA IS SEEN BY THE U.S. AS A VALUED ALLY. HE -- AND THROUGH HIM, THE PRIME MINISTER -- NEEDS TO HEAR FROM YOU A FRANK, BUT COLLEGIAL MESSAGE: SLOVAKIA NEEDS TO DO MORE TO LIVE UP TO ITS NATO COMMITMENTS, AND THE U.S. STANDS READY AND WILLING TO HELP.

VALLEE